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Lighting a Candle

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the author's activities as a researcher and public intellectual in Brazil, and his involvement on issues of higher education, science and technology, education reform and education policies in general.

1. The land of the future

In 1940 Stefan Zweig, the famous Austrian Jewish writer, moved to the Brazilian town of Petropolis, scaping Nazism, where he wrote "Brazil, Land of the Future" (Zweig and Stern, 1942). He saw it as a primitive country, naïve, but beautiful, socially diverse, endowed with abundant resources, and free from the conflicts and bitterness that plagued Europe. Europe was dying, he himself committed suicide in 1944, but a new and better world was on the making.

My Jewish parents also came from Europe to Brazil some years before, in the 1920s, escaping persecution and hoping for a better future (the personal information in this text is based on Schwartzman, 2021). I was born when the War started, learned how to read when it finished, and some of my first books were from the complete works of Stefan Zweig in Portuguese translation that my parents had bought, including "The World of Yesterday", about the *belle époque* of his youth, and "The Land of the Future", which was supposed to be mine.

Brazil, of course, was much older and less naïve than he described, a country with roots in the old Portuguese empire and four centuries of slavery, which left a legacy of poverty, "dangerous classes" living in the countryside and in the periphery of coastal cities, and a small elite sustained mostly from land rent and an incipient public bureaucracy. By the late 19th century, the country opened to international migration and a small middle class started to take shape in a few cities, critical of the local oligarchies and learning, mostly from French authors, what a developed and democratic society would be like. They learned from the Positivists the importance of science and technology, and, from the European Avant-Garde and Realism, the need to look, describe and face the miseries, but also the potential creativity and originality of the local culture. This awakening was, however, limited to few, that for a long time did not consider the need to bring the poor into the modern world through full citizenship and education. Social inequality run deep, not necessarily along ethnic, or racial lines, but strongly correlated to them.

After the War, the world was swept by the hopes of a new era of peace and prosperity, with the universal declaration human rights, the end of colonialism and economic prosperity that would do away with poverty and social discrimination. In Brazil, democracy replaced the Getúlio Vargas regime that had run the country for 15 years, radio and later TVs linked the country's remote regions to the urban centers, the economy started to expand, and people started to move from the country to the new and expanding cities. Some years later, I would have the opportunity to study the Vargas period at some length, through the works of Gustavo Capanema, who was Brazil's Minister for Education and tried to enforce a conservative agenda of education reform (Schwartzman et al., 2000).

I was part of this, growing up in Belo Horizonte, nested in the mountains of the historic mining state of Minas Gerais, where my parents settled. Belo Horizonte, inaugurated at the end of the 19th century as a planned city and designated as the state's capital, stood as a harbinger of modern Brazil, boasting a carefully designed street grid and ample boulevards (Bomeny, 1994). In the late 18th century, Minas Gerais had been the center of a gold rush based on slave labor that lasted a few decades and left the region with a large and impoverished population, and a politically well-connected small rural elite raising cattle, planting coffee in their farms and doing politics. The new town was to become the place, for those who could, to come and enjoy the benefits of urban life, deal with administrative chores, care for their ailments in modern hospitals, and send their children to study. It was the gathering place for a small group of poets and writers who intermingled with politicians and would play important roles in Brazil's culture and

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institutions. It also attracted a small number of foreign immigrants – Italians, Portuguese, Jews, Cristian Arabs, Germans – that could benefit from a growing services economy and the city's good mountain climate.

2. Humboldt for the people

Most of the population was illiterate, but, for the upper and ascending classes, there were two prestigious public schools, the Ginásio Mineiro (later named "Colégio Estadual de Minas Gerais"), for boys, preparing them for the learned professions of Law, Medicine and Engineering, and the Instituto de Educação, a normal school for girls, who were not expected to go do universities but could start a career as schoolteachers while waiting for a husband. The other possibility were the religious schools, most of them also segregated by sex. I started in a Jewish primary school, went to a middle school managed by American Baptist missionaries, and finished secondary education in a school created by the Italian colony, before entering the University of Minas Gerais.

The University was, as Belo Horizonte itself, a combination of the old and the new, emerging Brazil. Higher education started in Brazil in the 19th century with a few faculties of law, medicine engineering in the main cities, and the first universities were only established in 1930s. After the war, the national government created a network of federal universities by bringing together and nationalizing many small, private professional colleges that existed in different places, turning their part-time teachers into civil servants. The new university was dominated by the traditional faculties but also created space for new fields, such as the new School of Economics, which also provided a degree in sociology, political science, and public administration, which I joined. The students, most of them the first generation with a university degree, had big hopes, either to expand or consolidate their family's business, or enter the new public and private roles created by a modernizing economy and an expanding state and social services. A youth culture was growing around the city's bars, the students got together in political factions of different orientations and commemorated their degrees with festive and solemn ceremonies.

Born in a Jewish family, I was clearly not part of the local culture, with their roots in the country farms and an assured future in business, the learned professions or political careers. But I did not feel discriminated against and was optimistic about the future. In the small local Jewish community, my parents belonged to the progressive faction that cultivated Yiddish, admired the Soviet Union and was critical of Zionism. The new social sciences program attracted students looking for new and different paths, and most of us joined leftist political organizations of some kind. In 1961 I was one of the students who published Mosaico, a journal from the University student union illustrated by a black man crossing the baroque gates of a university, and the slogan, "Open the universities to the people and fight everywhere for what rightfully belongs to them" (Caldeira Brant, 1961). We were more active politically than most students and saw it as our mission to raise the population's awareness for the importance of knowledge and education, to break the molds of poverty and underdevelopment. Instead of lawyers, medical doctors and engineers that run the university, we wanted scientists, committed to the search of truth; and, instead of children of the old or upcoming elites, we wanted the people to fill in the university benches.

The incongruity of a popular Humboldtian university in a small town where most of the population was illiterate did not occur to us. Unwittingly, we were expressing Antonio Gramsci's ideas about the need to break the hegemony of the elites through popular education, without, however, looking at what was happening with education as such. We just assumed that, if the universities were run by true intellectuals and scientists like we wanted to become, we would eventually solve the problems of poverty and underdevelopment, as well as of illiteracy and ignorance.

3. Authoritarian modernization

These were the years of the cold war, and in 1964 a military government took over, throwing intellectuals and student activists in jails or forcing them to flee the country. I was caught in the middle, left the country for Norway, Argentina and later for my doctoral studies in Political Science at Berkeley, and returned to Brazil in 1969. I had a doctoral dissertation to write,and expected that, as a well-educated young social scientist, I could contribute to understand better the country's predicaments, and help to build the scientific community that would, one day, turn it into a modern and developed society.

Seldom has Brazil changed as much as in the 1970s, a period described by some as of "authoritarian modernization". Economic growth was running above 10 %, birth rates were high, millions were moving from the poorer to the richer regions and to the cities, and Brazil had just won the World's soccer cup. Political repression was rampant, with civil rights suspended and public universities being intervened or placed under strict surveillance. At the same time, in 1968 a higher education reform sought to bring to Brazil the North American research university model, with academic departments, institutes, graduate programs and professors with doctoral degrees, to replace the old professional colleges. The reform was implemented through an agreement between the Brazilian government and USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, and perceived by the opposition as just another instance of US right-wing intervention in Brazilian affairs. But it had many elements in common with the university reform we demanded

ten years earlier and had been introduced in the early sixties at the new University of Brasilia, led by Darcy Ribeiro, a left-wing intellectual and public figure.

For my doctoral studies at Berkeley, I had a fellowship from the Ford Foundation, which was actively involved in supporting the consolidation of modern social sciences in Brazil and other countries in Latin America. Additionally, they were instrumental in safeguarding students and academics who faced persecution under the oppressive military regimes of the region. (Puryear, 1983). I was supposed to return to work at the University of Minas Gerais after graduation, but the resurgence of political repression made it impossible, and I remained in Rio de Janeiro working in two private institutions, the Brazilian School of Public Administration (EBAP), part of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, and the Rio de Janeiro University Research Institute (IUPERJ), a small graduate and research program in sociology and political science associated with the Candido Mendes colleges. These places were mostly protected from political surveillance, and my dissertation was published as a book about the origins of political authoritarianism in Brazil (Schwartzman, 2015a).

My first two projects related to education were at the top and bottom at the education pyramid. At the bottom, Claudio de Moura Castro, my colleague from Minas Gerais, who was running a project supported by international donors, ECIEL, asked me to do a study on primary education in rural areas. The expectation, I assumed, was that I would do something similar for the countryside as Claudio had done in the cities, estimating the productivity of investments in education. Instead, I decided to challenge the theory of "human capital" that economists were using, countering it with Karl Polanyi's ideas about the destructive effects of markets on the social fabric. The conclusion was that the main effect of education in such areas would be to stimulate immigration to cities, and I ended up suggesting the need for an education that would be more relevant to keeping people in the countryside, in a more productive and sustainable way (Nunes et al., 1977). It was the 1970s, the peak of the great migration process from rural areas to cities in Brazil, which in fact, did not require formal education for this to happen. In the following years, on several occasions, I wrote texts casting doubt on the simplistic view of most economists regarding education and productivity, bringing up the topics of credentialism and market segmentation, particularly concerning higher education.

The other project was part of an international comparative study coordinated by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) a training arm of the United Nations. The subject was the consequences of highly qualified persons from developing countries studying abroad, mostly with government fellowships. Would they return to their country of origin, or stay out? The main finding was that, despite the political climate that had forced several students, including myself, to go into exile, Brazil was one of the countries with the highest rates of return. The economy was developing, higher education was expanding, and the political issues did not affect most people who went to study abroad. Globally, those who were more likely to stay abroad were individuals from educated minorities in certain countries, such as Jews in Argentina or Christians in Muslim countries (Glaser and Christopher Habers, 1978).

The military regime had many faces, from the rabid extreme right to modernizing technocrats and nationalists. Part of the economic boom that occurred since 1965 was due to the reforms led by Roberto Campos, an economist and diplomat who joined the government as Minister for Planning (his grandson, Roberto Campos Neto, is the current president of Brazil's Central Bank, as of 2023). He was succeeded by João Paulo dos Reis Veloso, by then a young economist who organized the Institute of Applied Economics Research (IPEA), a think tank responsible for the first studies on income inequality in Brazil, among other topics. Veloso, who succeeded Campos as the Minister of Planning between 1969 and 1979, had, under his wing, besides IPEA, the National Development Bank (BNDES), the National Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the National Research Council (CNPq) and the Financing Agency for Studies and Projects (FINEP), which provided resources for research and innovation. These agencies had resources, flexibility and institutional autonomy and recruited young economists and engineers who shared a broad view of the need to modernize the country through a combination of open market and government planning.

In the mid 1970s I received an invitation from Isaac Kerstenetzky, the president of Brazil's Statistical Office, IBGE, to join the Institute. He was a well-regarded economist of Jewish origin who had studied with Jan Tinbergen, politically liberal, but a firm believer in the virtues of economic planning. He wanted the Institute to get involved on the issues of poverty, and recruited anthropologists and sociologists for this work, as a counterpoint to the quantitative studies related to economic planning he was also implementing. I was, however, politically suspect, and my name did not pass the ideological screening of the National Information Agency. Shortly after I had another invitation, this time from José Pelúcio Ferreira, also an economist who was the president of FINEP, the science and technology agency. I told him that I had just been vetoed at IBGE, but he said he could circumvent it by bringing me on loan from Getúlio Vargas Foundation.

José Pelúcio, like his friend Kerstenetzky, was a firm believer in economic planning, surrounded himself with a group of young like-minded economists, and kept close ties with scientists who just a few years before had been ostracized by the military regime. My first task at FINEP was to run a new section of support for "culture", understood in terms of C. P. Snow, as the opposite of the natural sciences, which included anything from music record companies to emerging social sciences graduate programs. I did not stay in this post for long, but FINEP, together with a revamped National Research Council, for the first time in Brazil's history, recognized the social sciences as a research area worthy of public support.

4. The scientific community

My next task at FINEP was to join its research department to run an ambitious project on the history of Brazilian science and technology. It was José Pelúcio's idea. He had already discussed it with Isaac Kerstenetzky and the economist Annibal Villela, the author of several works on the history of industrialization in Brazil. Villela had outlined a proposal, but was unable to pursue the work, which fell into my hands. From what I understood, the objective was to show how technology had been crucial in the various stages of the country's economic development, and thus reinforce the thesis that it was necessary to continue investing in technology for the progress to continue. I couldn't do it myself because I'm not an economist, and I was not convinced that technology by itself had such a powerful role. However, José Pelúcio had a broader interest and curiosity about the individuals who had contributed to the science and technology of the country. We agreed, then, to start a major project to record the testimonies of scientists and institution builders who contributed to of the development of Brazilian science up to then. The fact that our research was being conducted by a government agency during a military regime generated suspicion among some interviewees, especially those who had been directly affected by repression. It was great when we were able to take advantage of one of our researchers' trip to Europe, and he interviewed the physicist José Leite Lopes, who was in exile. In Brazil, it was not easy to convince the preeminent physicist Mário Schenberg of our good intentions, but finally, he agreed to be interviewed.

The main outcome of this study, the book on the development of the scientific community in Brazil, became a standard reference in field of history and sociology of science in Brazil, and also carried a criticism of the way science and technology policies were being implemented by FINEP and the economists around it (Schwartzman, 1991, 2015b). For them, science and technology were just an input in the economic planning process, to be managed from the top. What I tried to show in the book was that science, to thrive, requires an active and autonomous community of scholars, who, in turn, depended on an enlightened, broad academic and institutional culture that Brazil did not quite have.

5. Higher education in the New Republic

In 1985, after 20 years in power, the military government retreated. The ambitious development plans of the 1970 did not survive the combination of excessive ambitions and the oil and debt crises, and the pressure for a return to civilian run was increasing. In a negotiated transition, the would-be first civil president, Tancredo Neves, died just before being sworn and was replaced by a traditional politician, José Sarney, who had supported the military until the last moment. One of the promises of the would-be President was to create a national commission to assess the country's higher education system and make suggestions for reform. The new government kept the promise, inviting 24 people extracted from different persuasions and representing different interest groups – public universities, catholic schools, traditional lawyers, teacher union representatives, students, and some intellectuals. I was one of them, and became the commission's rapporteur, in charge of drafting the conclusions and recommendations. (Comissão Nacional para a Reformulação da Educação Superior, 1985).

The report was sent to the Ministry of Education, who created a working group to prepare a new higher education legislation. Our proposals and those of the working group were not the same but had many points in common. First, to grant more autonomy to public universities, which would have a global endowment to use their resources more freely; in return, they would be subjected to an external evaluation system carried out by a restructured Federal Education Council. Second, it was necessary to consider diversification, meaning that all higher education institutions could not be treated in the same way, as they are different, with the vast majority emphasizing teaching and a few focusing on research. And third, we proposed that good-quality private institutions with philanthropic purposes should also be entitled to public funding, under a regime of monitoring and supervision.

The bill was prepared and sent to Congress. However, due to opposition from teachers' unions, university staff, and students, it was withdrawn. The main fear, apparently, was that, with effectively autonomous institutions, the unions would have to negotiate with each institution, rather than collectively, and the teacher's job stability would be threatened. Our proposal to change the Federal Education Council, a powerful body with strong presence of private institutions, was also resented.

Our frustration with higher education reform was just part of the "lost decade" that started with the new civilian government. Other similar commissions, on reform of public administration and constitutional reform, had the same fate. The government only cared for its survival, and tried to coopt any interest group that could make its voice heard, provided it did not conflict with others. The price was to expand public expenditures, leading to hyperinflation. There was no coherent policy nor money for public investments in research, but the scientists wanted a Ministry of Science and Technology, and it was granted, creating a new bureaucracy. The previous policy of closing Brazil's market for importing personal computers had been a failure, but a new legislation keeping the market closed and curtailing access to the new technology for to the benefit of a small group of local companies was maintained. Hyperinflation was finally contained in 1994, with the "Real Plan" led by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a sociologist from the University of São Paulo who had embraced a successful political career and became Brazil's president between 1995 and 2001.

6. The higher education research group

In 1987 I received an invitation to come to the University of São Paulo – USP - to help with the establishment of a research group on higher education, Nupes, which was to become the first academic program dedicated to the subject in Brazil, if not in Latin America. The invitation came from Eunice R. Durham, an anthropologist who was an adviser to the university's rector, José Goldenberg, a well-known physicist who later played important roles as Minister of education and the organizer of Rio de Janeiro's Earth Summit of 1992. Goldenberg had created a scandal by leaking to the press a list of professors from the university who had not published in the previous two years, and his tenure was market by important reforms in the institution, thanks in part to a significant loan secured from the Interamerican Development Bank to upgrade the university's installations and laboratories.

The main idea of Nupes was to establish the field of the study and research on higher education in Brazil, which did not exist, and to develop studies that could contribute more directly to the functioning of USP (Durham and eSchwartzman, 1990) We organized a specialized library, including subscriptions to the main international journals in the field, managed to hire a secretary, and formed a small group of young researchers and doctoral students. With additional resources from the Ford Foundation and São Paulo's Research Foundation, Fapesp, we conducted a research on the professional trajectory of USP students, comparing students and graduates in physics, engineering, pedagogy, and social sciences (both academic and professional careers) and joined an international research project on higher education policies in Latin America, coordinated by José Joaquín Brunner from Chile, with the participation of Jorge Balán and Ana Fanelli from Argentina, and Rollin Kent from Mexico, among others (Brunner et al., 1995; Schwartzman, 1993). We created an international advisory board with participation from Burton R. Clark, Ulrich Teichler, José Arthur Giannotti and José Joaquin Brunner, and started to build a network of Brazilian scholars working on issues of higher education.

However, as an interdisciplinary nucleus linked to the rectorate, we found ourselves isolated, and found it difficult to establish stronger connections and recruit students either from the Department of Anthropology, where Eunice Durham taught, or from the department to which I was affiliated, Political Science. We tried to approach the School of Education, even by donating our library in their collection, but we were not well received because they did not deal with higher education, and resented Goldenberg's emphasis on academic quality and achievement. On hindsight, we did not invest enough as we should in the education of doctoral students who could be become the seeds of a new generation of scholars in the field. When Goldenberg became Brazil's Minister of Education, he carried Eunice Durham with him to Brasilia and a few years later, in 1994, I also left, to become the president of Brazil's statistical office, IBGE, in Rio de Janeiro, for five years. Nupes continued to exist for a few more years, and later became part of a larger research group on social policies, which still exists.

7. Science and technology for a new world

Before IBGE, however, there was another challenge. The World Bank has been supporting Brazil's science and technology sector with significant loans since 1984, and, in negotiations for a third renewal, one requisite was that Brazil should prepare a policy paper making explicit the country's science and technology policies. I was invited to coordinate this work, and created a working group, based at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation Business School in São Paulo, to do it. In our final recommendations, we stated that "the new policy should avoid both the excesses of laissez-faire and centralized planning. A conventional liberal policy of scientific and technological development will not produce the necessary scale and quality of capability. Large-scale, highly sophisticated, and concentrated technological projects will not be able to generate sufficiently broad impacts on the educational and industrial systems. Attempts to centrally plan and coordinate all fields of science and technology run the risk of expanding inefficient bureaucracies and stifling the initiative and creativity of researchers." And we concluded: "the new science and technology policy must implement seemingly contradictory tasks: to stimulate the freedom, initiative, and creativity of researchers while establishing a strong connection between what they do and the needs of the economy, the educational system, and society. It must also make Brazilian science and technology truly international and strengthen the domestic educational and scientific and technological

capacity of the country." These proposals were supported by a detailed analysis of the country's capabilities in S&T, and of the international context, published in three volumes (Schwartzman, 1994; Schwartzman et al., 1995a, 1995b, 1995c).

It was a nice academic exercise that remained on paper. The Ministry of Science and Technology did not pay attention to it, and the World Bank renewed the loan agreement for another three years and more 360 million dollars. Brazil's science and technology continued to be as it was left after the demise of the ambitious development plans of the 1970s: a fairly extensive network of poorly supported academic programs in public universities, some better than others, financed by federal agencies controlled by the academics themselves, with little or no impact on the country's economy and society.

8. The Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE)

IBGE is Brazil's national statistical office, responsible for the production all kinds of demographic and economic and geographical data, including the decennial census, household surveys, national accounts, employment statistics, cost of living indexes and mapping. It was established in 1936 as a national agency, with one branch in each municipality, and a central office in Rio de Janeiro to process and publish all this information. In 1994 Brazil's economy was in shambles, annual inflation was running at 800 % a year, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, then Ministry of the Economy, invited a small group of economists to devise a plan to stabilize the economy, which was successful and became known as "Plano Real". Previous stabilization plans had failed, and one problem they had was how to administer the cost-of-living indexes so that past inflation would not be carried on to the new currency. IBGE, at the time, was a large and ineffectual public bureaucracy, and it was important to make sure that it would not blunder this time. I was invited to head the Institute with the immediate task of taking care of this transition, which I did without much trouble. With the success of the stabilization program, Cardoso was elected Brazil's president and I remained as head of the Institute until 1988. It was my first (and only) experience of running a large organization.

IBGE had a very ambitious public mandate but an aging and very ineffective structure of about 10 thousand employees with low qualifications scattered throughout the country and a very limited number of qualified economists, statisticians, and geographers capable of producing the good quality information that was required. IBGE's institutional myth was that it was destined to provide the required data for the centralized planning of Brazil's economy and society. Not by chance, this myth had been cultivated both by Teixeira de Freitas, the man who organized and run IBGE during the Getúlio Vargas dictatorship in the 1930s and early 1940s, and Isaac Kerstenetzky, who headed it from 1970 to 1979, under the military regime. I tried to change this by arguing that democratic societies need good governance, but not central planning, and that the main purpose of the national statistical office was to provide reliable information for the broader society, and not just for the government, which was one of the users of this information, but not its sole client. In those years, Internet was becoming available and computers more accessible, and I was able to make the institutes' information timelier and more accessible than in the past. With the help of Canada's statistical office, we revised and updated the statistical data we collected, and made better use of the cooperation of the United Nations Statistical Commission (Senra, 2009; Schwartzman et al., 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). I was unable, however, to convince the Cardoso government to support the broader institutional and organizational changes the institute required and decided to leave the post in the transition to his second mandate, in 1988.

9. Secondary education

After IBGE, I did not return to my previous institutions. I led, for a few years, an effort to establish a branch of the American Institutes for Research in Brazil, and then joined the Institute for Studies on Labor and Society (Instituto de Estudos do Trabalho. Sociedade - IETS) in Rio de Janeiro, that had as its focus issues of social policy in the city. I also joined the Institute of Studies on Economic Policy (Instituto de Estudos de Política Econômica – IEPE - Casa das Garças), created by several of the economists what led the Plano Real in 1994. There, together with Edmar Bacha, I run a seminar on social policy that resulted in a book arguing or a new social policy agenda for the 21st century (Bacha and Schwartzman, 2011).

Most of my work since then was related to education, particularly on issues of secondary education reform. The facts are clear. Access of basic education at last expanded in Brazil since the 1980s, but its quality remains abysmal, with a significant portion of students reaching secondary education lacking even the most basic competencies in reading and writing. Unfortunately, the curriculum of secondary schools has been heavily focused on academic pursuits, primarily geared towards preparing students for higher education entrance examinations. I did some research and published a small book on the issue, joining the debates that led do a new bill sent to Congress reforming secondary education (Schwartzman, 2016). The central idea was that, instead of a single, overloaded curriculum focused on higher education entrance examinations, secondary education should create opportunities for vocational and professional training for most students who need to enter directly into the job market and are unlikely to pursue higher education. For the more academically oriented students, schools should offer various "educational pathways" in areas such as technology and engineering, social professions, education, and more. Additionally, there should be a common core curriculum with an emphasis on broader competencies in language, mathematics, and science. The new model drew strong resistance from the school establishment, reflecting confusion and fears about how to implement it and ideological opposition to vocational education. The new model should start to be implemented in 2022, but, in 2023, the Ministry of Education decided to open a public consultation on whether and how the reform should occur,. and the main decision was, in essence, to return to the previous situation of a unified curriculum with little space for different pathways and vocational education. It was more comfortable to the education bureaucracies and the teaching corporations, that have lobbied since the beginning against the reform.

10. Lightening a candle

I am not sure, of course, that I was always right in the policies that I helped to put forward and on the stands I took in the several debates on science, technology, higher, secondary and vocational education in which I participated throughout these years. It is evident, however, that my views often found themselves in the minority. Through these experiences, I came to realize that policy implementation was mostly determined by a combination of inertia and the protection of established interests, rather than being guided by the suitability and merit of policy proposals or the strength of supporting arguments and evidence. Because of these decisions or lack of decisions, Brazil has an expensive, bloated and highly inefficient education system, very difficult to improve. Reflecting on the past, I believe that my primary role has been to consistently shed light on the reasons why things often do not progress as anticipated, and to highlight the existence of alternative approaches that could yield superior outcomes if only they were put into practice. For the future, things may eventually get better, which may compensate for all these years of keeping the candle lit and sometimes burning my fingers.

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